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INTERIOR FOR US GEOLOGICAL SURVEY DR. JAYNE BELNAP

E.O.12958: N /A

TAGS: [MASS](#) [SENV](#) [EAGR](#) [EAID](#) [ECON](#) [PGOV](#) [PREF](#) [SOCI](#) [KE](#)

SUBJECT: Tapping Water in Kenya's Arid North Eastern Province, Part Two

Reference: Nairobi 1851

Summary

¶1. In Kenya's arid North Eastern Province, livelihoods have centered on pastoralism (the practice of herding livestock) for hundreds of years. However, decades of gradual sedentarization (a shift from nomadism to permanent settlement) have created new dependencies and a more fragile ecosystem. Past development efforts have accelerated sedentarization and created conditions that have allowed for large increases in the number of livestock by increasing the number of fixed water points available for human and livestock consumption. This has compounded the ecosystem's fragility and has become a periodic source of violent conflict.

¶2. While the Government of Kenya (GOK), the NGO community, and other donors realize that water is an important issue for the future of North Eastern Province, many interventions have focused on either short-term emergency response or the "more is better" philosophy, which only deepens the region's long-term problems. Although the GOK has recently undertaken comprehensive water sector reforms, the government is still in the process of formulating a comprehensive water development plan for Kenya's arid and semi-arid lands (ASALs). At present, there are many independent organizations on the ground that intervene in the water sector. Implementation of Combined Joint Task Force Horn of Africa (CJTF-HOA) well-drilling activities has highlighted several development challenges. These challenges include the need for better stakeholder consultation and pre-drilling consideration of the full spectrum of environmental, hydrological, social, and cultural factors. In light of the fragility of the ASALs ecosystems, CJTF-HOA, its U.S. mission partners, and the GOK are collectively seeking ways to proactively identify a more sustainable and strategic way forward. End Summary.

¶3. This is the second of two cables describing the challenges of development in Kenya's North Eastern Province and other ASALs, particularly in terms of water

development, in which the CJTF-HOA is providing assistance.

Years of Sedentarization
Have Taken Their Toll

¶4. Reftel described some of the factors leading to the gradual permanent or semi-permanent settlement of a large proportion of the North Eastern Province's traditionally pastoral society. While there are still a significant number of pastoralists who make a living (and drive the area's economy) by raising livestock according to traditional methods and migration routes, decades of overgrazing and overpopulation have taken their toll on the fragile arid landscape.

¶5. Limited relief and development efforts have traditionally focused on emergency relief or support for the livestock industry, and both activities often involve the development of new water sources. While people and livestock need clean sources of water, new water points meant to extend the reach of grazing areas also attract new permanent settlements. When this happens, grazing areas can easily be denuded of critical perennial grasses by overgrazing of newly settled pastoralists' livestock. The primary source of violent conflict among the various ethnic Somali clans (the vast majority of the region's inhabitants) is over water and grazing land. Not surprisingly, peacebuilding programs are also a focus of donor assistance in the region.

NAIROBI 00001854 002 OF 004

CJTF-HOA Steps Into A Complex Situation

¶6. More and more organizations are beginning to pay attention to the various development needs of North Eastern Province. In addition to the various ministries from the GOK, non-governmental organizations, international organizations, the World Bank, and other donors are on the ground providing different types of assistance. Emergency food relief, water and livestock development, and new infrastructure are just a few of these projects. In addition, there are several agencies under the Ministry of Water alone that are in the water development business.

¶7. One of the GOK actors is the Ministry of Defense (KDOD), which is increasingly working in conjunction with the Ministry of Water to drill new boreholes. CJTF-HOA has provided support to KDOD in the form of U.S. Navy Construction Battalions (Seabees) and U.S. Geologic Survey (USGS) scientists to help determine what sites would have the best chance of producing water. Currently, CJTF-HOA's well drilling activities are confined to the Garissa District in North Eastern Province, but KDOD would like them to expand their activities across northern Kenya.

More is Not Necessarily Better

¶8. Like many of the development activities in North Eastern Province, however, the Ministry of Water and KDOD view water development as short-term humanitarian emergency assistance. We have been told repeatedly by Ministry of Water and KDOD officials that environmental impact assessments "required by law" are not needed for water projects in the North Eastern Province because the region is in a "state of emergency." (Note: Boreholes in arid areas have a more intense impact on the environment than in other areas, and have a tendency to exacerbate emergencies if poorly managed. This makes the need for rational environmental assessments even more acute. End Note.)

¶9. Without an understanding of the adverse consequences of borehole proliferation, both the Ministry of Water and KDOD appear to have a "more is better" philosophy. For example, rumor has it that a new road to Marsabit (in upper Eastern Province) will be constructed by the Chinese with boreholes every 10 kilometers. Failing to make the connection that new boreholes have caused many a violent conflict in northern Kenya and draws people across borders, KDOD has incorporated water development into its "securitization" plan, and would like to dig new boreholes all across Kenya's arid north, including border towns with Somalia. The KDOD has also cited humanitarian concerns and the need to provide logistical support to Kenyan security forces as reasons to drill additional boreholes in this region.

¶10. While CJTF-HOA pursues its regional security capacity building and engagement initiatives through humanitarian and other activities, we will continue to assist them in refining their support by taking a more holistic and strategic approach. CJTF-HOA, in cooperation with its U.S. mission partners, can then help guide their Kenyan counterparts in developing a sounder approach to water development and management in these ecologically sensitive areas. Some of the organizations involved in water development understand the issues, but it is far from clear that this understanding permeates the planning process.

Better Understanding,
Stronger Oversight Needed

NAIROBI 00001854 003 OF 004

¶11. Development activities in North Eastern Province are ostensibly coordinated and approved at the district level by the District Steering Group (DSG), an interagency meeting chaired by the World Bank-funded Arid Lands Resource Management Project, which was recently subordinated to the newly-formed Ministry of State for the Development of Northern Kenya and Other Arid Lands (reftel). The meetings are attended by district-level ministry representatives, religious leaders, youth, women, nongovernmental organizations and other civil society members.

¶12. In Garissa, the DSG has become a good example of the coordination and planning process should look like. The Garissa DSG, for example, recently refused the request of a Member of Parliament to dig a new borehole in his constituency for political reasons. This type of behavior is rare in the Kenyan bureaucracy, and it deserves encouragement. The new Arid Lands Ministry is best positioned to play a watchdog role in preventing poorly-conceived development, but to do so effectively will require an aggressive interpretation of its mandate and an attitudinal shift by other organizations in the water development business. This may prove to be a significant challenge for a newly-established ministry with a more limited budget than Water and other ministries.

¶13. Digging a borehole (or constructing a pan, i.e., stockpond, or dam) is only one step in establishing a water management project. In order for a project to be successful and sustainable, there must be a community that wants and is willing to manage the new resource. There must also be an understanding of how the new resource will impact the surrounding ecosystem and existing grazing patterns. At present, water development projects envisioned by Ministry of Water and KDOD reflect only a nascent understanding of these issues. For example, the KDOD and the Ministry of Water often overlook the advice of the National Environment Management Authority (NEMA), which is charged with the responsibility of ensuring that all development projects adhere to environmental

considerations. There is currently no overarching mechanism in place to ensure sound placement and management of new water sources.

Next Steps

¶14. Embassy Science Fellow Dr. Jayne Belnap, a senior scientist at the U.S. Geologic Survey, has had years of experience grappling with arid lands development issues and recently traveled to the North Eastern Province to consult with CJTF-HOA, government officials, and community members and help chart a way forward. As a result, we have created some draft guidelines for CJTF-HOA's future water development activities. We will also be encouraging the Garissa DSG to strengthen its oversight of water development projects by using CJTF-HOA and KDOD as pilots.

¶15. The new Arid Lands Ministry is working on a strategic development plan for Kenya's arid areas. We will urge the Ministry's leadership to include water management as a key component of this new strategy. However, we do know that the new minister and his technical staff, inherited from the World Bank-funded Arid Lands Resource Management Project (reftel), understand the special considerations needed for dry lands development, and we will support at every opportunity their efforts to exercise oversight over water development.

¶16. We will also continue to encourage other ministries to incorporate an understanding of dry lands development into their planning. Initial discussions with KDOD have been

NAIROBI 00001854 004 OF 004

fruitful in this regard. In the ASALs, USAID currently supports projects including water and sanitation improvement (Marsabit district), the North Eastern Pastoral Development Program, and the Regional Enhanced Livelihoods program in pastoral areas. Managers of these USAID programs will be working with the Arid Lands Ministry on organizing stakeholder consultations and provide training on pastoral areas development. Ultimately, we hope these efforts will contribute to sounder planning for the benefit of the long-marginalized population of Kenya's ASALs.

SLUTZ